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Problems in the Book of Jonah The Date and Authorship

Howard W. Tepker

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_tepkerh@csl.edu

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PROBLEMS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH
THE DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Old Testament Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Howard W. Tepker

June 1953

Approved by:

George I. Schick
Advisor

Alex H. L. Guebert
Reader

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CHAPTER I

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Within recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the messages of the Old Testament prophets. It is the opinion of many scholars and Bible-reading Christians that the days of the prophets closely resemble those of the twentieth century. Again in our modern world there are wars and rumors of wars; world powers are on the move; there is alarm over the moral behavior of men; a sense of materialism pervades modern civilization; and God's people seemingly are caught in the midst of it and are being carried along against their will with the current of the times.

The Old Testament prophets, therefore, speak to our age with tremendous and challenging force. They present to us God's own interpretation of history. They show us the principles of divine providence and justice as they operated in ancient times. What is even more important, a study of the unfolding of God's plan as given by the prophets finally leads to Christ as the fulfillment.

Among the prophetic messages that are particularly applicable to modern times is the book of Jonah. Scholars, both conservative and liberal, hold this little book in high esteem. Cornill states:

This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say

to everyone that approaches it, "Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." In this book Israelitish prophecy quits the scene of battle as victor, and as victor in its severest struggle -- that against itself.¹

George Adam Smith says:

The truth which we find in the book of Jonah is as full a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves. That God has granted unto the Gentiles also repentance unto life is nowhere else in the Old Testament so vividly illustrated. This lifts the teaching of the Book to equal rank with the second part of Isaiah and nearest of our Twelve to the New Testament.²

Liberal scholarship finds in the book a rebuke of the "narrow spirit of nationalism, of racial hatreds, of contempt for alien peoples, of human antagonisms whenever and wherever found."³ The conservatives emphasize the fact that this prophecy of Jonah served to impress on the Israelites that the Lord's salvation was not to be confined to one nation, but was for all peoples.⁴

But the book of Jonah has been the object also of many attacks, especially in recent years. Modern scholarship has called into question the miracle involving the great fish,

¹Kyle M. Yates, Preaching From The Prophets (New York: Harper & Brothers, c.1942), p. 190.

²George A. Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (Revised Edition; New York and London: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), II, 484.

³Raymond Calkins, The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, c.1947), p. 171.

⁴Carl F. Keil, "The Twelve Minor Prophets," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), I, 386.

the conversion of Nineveh, the rapid growth of the gourd, etc. Likewise the entire problem of authorship, date of composition and method of interpretation, has been made the object of much critical investigation.

It shall be the purpose of this thesis to study a few of these problems, examining both the conservative and liberal points of view. Because of the scope of the subject at hand, this study will be limited to an investigation of the date and authorship of the book of Jonah.

CHAPTER II

THE TESTIMONY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

In seeking to determine the date and authorship of the book of Jonah, we shall gather, first of all, what information we may from the sacred Scripture itself. In only five places does the Bible record the name of Jonah: in the prophecy itself, in 2 Kings 14:25 and in the New Testament passages Matthew 12:39 f.; 16:4 and Luke 11:29-30. Since the New Testament passages have no immediate and direct bearing on the date and authorship of the Book, but chiefly on its historicity, we shall limit our discussion at this point to the Old Testament references.

The book of Jonah, unlike many of the other prophetic writings, does not begin with a title which definitely fixes the time of composition. Some of the prophecies, such as that of Amos, begin with a statement listing the names of the kings under whom the prophet labored, thus establishing the date. This, however, is lacking in the case of Jonah, which introduces the prophecy with the simple formula: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying."

Then follows a vivid and fascinating account of the prophet's mission to Nineveh. He received the commission from the Lord: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for its wickedness has come up before me."

Nineveh was the capital of the kingdom of Assyria, the traditional foe and oppressor of the Israelites. It has repeatedly been called a great city,¹ and its size is given as three day's journey.² This agrees with the statement of classical writers who call it the largest city in the world at that time. According to modern excavations and recent discoveries the name Nineveh was used in a twofold sense: first, for one particular city; and secondly, for a complex of four large primeval cities, including Nineveh proper. The circumference of Nineveh, in this broader sense, was about 480 furlongs, or sixty miles.³

Both in the Assyrian inscriptions and in Holy Scripture Nineveh is described as a wicked city, a city of blood, filled with lies and robbery,⁴ known for its cruelty toward the vanquished.

Against this city Jonah was to pronounce the judgment of God. His message is given in Jonah 3:4: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." But instead of proceeding at once to the Assyrian capital and carrying out his divine

¹Gen. 10:11; Jonah 3:2-3; 4:11.

²Jonah 3:3.

³Carl F. Keil, "The Twelve Minor Prophets," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), I, 390.

⁴Nahum 3:1, 19. See also Jack Finegan, Light From The Ancient Past (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c.1946), p. 170.

commission, Jonah went to the seaport of Joppa, paid his fare and got aboard a ship going to Tarshish, which was probably a Phoenician port in Spain. He was "fleeing...from the presence of the Lord" i.e. out of the land of Israel, where Jehovah dwelt in the temple, and manifested His presence. It was not that Jonah imagined he could actually hide himself from God, but he was withdrawing himself from the service of Jehovah. His motive for flight was neither fear for his safety, nor hesitancy because of the difficulty he might have in carrying out God's command. Keil states:

The motive for his flight was...as Jonah himself says in ch. iv. 2, anxiety lest the compassion of God should spare the sinful city in the event of its repenting. He had no wish to cooperate in this; and that not merely because "he knew, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, that the repentance of the Gentiles would be the ruin of the Jews, and, as a lover of his country, was actuated not so much by envy of the salvation of Nineveh, as by unwillingness that his own people should perish," as Jerome supposes, but also because he really grudged salvation to the Gentiles, and feared lest their conversion to the living God should infringe upon the privileges of Israel above the Gentile world, and put an end to its election as the nation of God.⁵

But Jonah was soon to find that he could not escape the presence of Jehovah, nor withdraw from His service, for "Jehovah sent forth a great wind on the sea." A violent storm arose so that "the ship reckoned to be dashed to pieces." In vivid language Jonah, as it were, ascribes to the ship a sense of its own danger, as it rolls and creaks and quivers

⁵Keil, op. cit., p. 391 f.

in the storm.⁶ This in contrast to the dullness of the prophet who was fast asleep in the hold of the ship. Probably before the storm had begun, he had gone down into the lower deck, withdrawing from sight, since inwardly he was ashamed of what he had done. Sorrow and remorse, together with fatigue then brought on a deep sleep.

Meanwhile, the seamen did everything possible to save themselves and their ship. They cried for help "everyone to his god." They were heathen, "ignorant of the truth, but not ignorant of the rule of providence."⁷ But since the storm did not abate, they also resorted to other means, safeguarding their lives. "They threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea" to lighten the ship of its burden.

The freight may have been corn which was exported in considerable quantities from Joppa, or manufactured articles from Tyre, which were exchanged with Spain for silver and other metals.⁸

When the danger was at its height, the captain of the ship awakened Jonah, insisted that he pray to his God; perhaps God would give a thought to them, so that they would not perish. Strange indeed, that a heathen mariner had to ad-

⁶E. B. Pusey, The Minor Prophets, A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1950), I, 400.

⁷Ibid.

⁸W. J. Deane, "The Book of Jonah," The Pulpit Commentary, H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, editors (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), XIV, 3.

monish the Hebrew prophet to pray. Pusey ventures the guess that perhaps the captain had seen something special about Jonah, his manner or his prophet's garb.⁹ Or Jonah may have spoken earlier of his flight. At any rate, the captain referred to Jonah's God as $\square 's7 \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } s7$, "the God."

But since the storm still had not abated as a result of Jonah's prayer, the sailors, firmly believing that someone in the ship had committed a crime which had aroused the anger of God, resorted to the lot in an attempt to discover who the culprit was. When the lot fell upon Jonah, the sailors called upon him to confess his guilt, asking him about his country, his occupation, and his parentage. His occupation, they thought, might have been one to arouse the anger of God, or his country and family might have been such as would expose him to the wrath of heaven. Jonah, by this time, had lost all of his previous indecision and spiritual dullness; in a straightforward manner he confessed the whole truth, admitting that he was a Hebrew - the name by which Israelites were known to foreigners - and confessing that the God whom he worshiped and served was "the God of heaven, who created the sea and the dry land." Thus he implied that Jahweh, the Lord of heaven, had sent the storm upon the sea. In an exclamation of horror and amazement at his sin and folly, the sailors asked Jonah: "What hast thou done?" That one who worshiped

⁹Pusey, op. cit., p. 401.

the Almighty Creator should disobey his command seemed to them to be outrageous and inexcusable. The Pulpit Commentary remarks: "The prophet does not spare himself in giving the history of the transaction. To be thus rebuked by heathen sailors must have added to the poignancy of his remorse."¹⁰

Seeing the omnipotence of God in the storm, they felt how awful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. This intense fear of the Lord's wrath on account of the prophet's sin prompted them to ask Jonah what they should do that the storm might cease. Knowing that they were dealing with a servant of the Lord of heaven, they hesitated to inflict punishment according to their own judgment. He should pronounce his own sentence. This Jonah did. He told them: "Cast me into the sea; for I know that for my sake this great storm is come upon you." As Jerome remarks:

He does not refuse, or prevaricate, or deny, but having made confession concerning his flight, he willingly endures the punishment, desiring to perish, and not let others perish on his account.¹¹

Jonah admitted that he deserved to die for his rebellion against God, and expressed the opinion that God's wrath could be appeased only by his death. He was fully acquainted with the justice of God.

The sailors, however, seemed to hesitate at anything so

¹⁰Deane, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹Keil, op. cit., p. 396.

drastic as casting the prophet into the raging sea. Instead they made a supreme effort to row back to the land and escape from the storm. $\lambda\gamma\eta\pi^2$ literally, "they broke through," namely, the waves. The Septuagint uses $\pi\rho\epsilon\beta\iota\sigma\sigma\omicron\tau\omicron$ meaning "they put forth violent efforts." They tried to force their way through the waves with oars, since the use of the sails was impractical. But they were unsuccessful in their attempt to row back to the land, and it became evident to them that they must follow the suggestion of the prophet and cast him into the sea. Since he was a servant of Jehovah, whom they were about to sacrifice, they address themselves in prayer to Jonah's God before they lay hands upon him. They plead: "We beseech Thee, let us not perish for the sake of the soul of this man, and lay not upon us innocent blood." Do not charge us with his death, "for Thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased Thee." The sailors considered themselves to be merely the agents, carrying out the will of God. The whole affair had been determined by the Almighty Himself: the tempest, the lot, the sentence, were all the working of divine providence.

After they had prayed, they cast Jonah into the sea, and "the sea stood still from its raging." The sudden calm that came over the sea showed that the storm had been sent on Jonah's account, and that the crew had not shed innocent blood by casting him into the sea. In this sudden change in the weather the hand of God was manifested. The sailors re-

cognized the supernatural element in the storm, and in the fear of God they offered sacrifices and vowed vows that they would offer him still more sacrifices when they arrived at their destination. Dr. Pusey says:

This great miracle completed the conversion of the mariners. God had removed all human cause of fear; and yet in the same words as before, he says, "they feared a great fear," but he adds, "the Lord." It was the great fear with which even the disciples of Jesus feared, when they saw the miracles which He did, which made even Peter say, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹²

The second chapter of the Book of Jonah relates the story of the prophet's deliverance. A fish, appointed of God for this purpose, swallowed Jonah. $\int \int \int$ being a Piel form, does not mean "to create," as though the Almighty prepared a special fish for this purpose; rather the thought is that, in His divine providence, God brought it about that the great fish was at that precise spot and swallowed Jonah when he was cast into the sea. The narrative does not define what kind of a fish it was. The Septuagint and the New Testament (Matt. 12:40) translate it by the indefinite word *Ky Tos*, "a sea-monster." It may have been a large shark or sea-dog, canis carcharias, or squalus carcharias, which were common in the Mediterranean at that time and had a throat large enough to swallow a man alive. The narrative attaches no special importance to the kind of fish that it

¹²Pusey, op. cit., p. 406.

was. The real miracle consisted in the fact that Jonah was kept alive to the third day, and then was vomited unhurt upon the land. Dr. Pusey makes the following observation:

The infant is buried, as it were, in the womb of its mother; it cannot breathe, and yet, thus too, it liveth and is preserved, wonderfully nurtured by the will of God. He who preserved the embryo in its living grave can maintain the life of man as easily without the outward air as with it. The same Divine Will preserves in being the whole creation, or creates it.¹³

While in the fish's belly, Jonah offered a prayer of thanksgiving since God had graciously delivered him from the depths of the sea. This prayer has mystified modern critics; they find it difficult to understand why a person would offer a prayer of thanksgiving after he had been swallowed by a shark. But earlier commentators have pointed out that when Jonah had been swallowed by the fish, and found that he was being preserved alive in the fish's belly, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance, for which he praised the Lord. Luther also observes that the prophet

did not actually utter these very words with his mouth, and arrange them in this orderly manner, in the belly of the fish; but that he here shows what the state of his mind was, and what thoughts he had when he was engaged in this conflict with death.¹⁴

The prayer contains many reminiscences from the psalms, which were familiar to him as a prophet and a devout Israelite. Keil remarks:

¹³Ibid., p. 407.

¹⁴Keil, op. cit., p. 399.

It is the simple and natural utterance of a man versed in the Holy Scripture and living in the Word of God, and in perfect accordance with the prophet's circumstances and the state of his mind.¹⁵

Reminiscent of Psalm 18:7 and 120:1, the prophet relates:

"I cried to Jehovah out of my distress, and He heard me; out of the womb of hell I cried: Thou heardest my voice." The waters choked his speech; but he cried with a loud voice to God who knew the heart. Death to him seemed so certain that it appeared as if he were already in the womb of Sheol.

יָיָוָה בֶּטֶן שְׁאוֹל does not refer to the belly of the shark, but it is a poetic figure used to denote the danger of death, from which there is apparently no escape.¹⁶

In verses 3 to 7 Jonah describes in remarkably picturesque language the feeling of despair which came over him as he descended into the deep. It was Jehovah Himself who had cast him into the deep, into the heart of the seas, the deepest abyss of the ocean, so that the current of the sea encompassed him on all sides, and above, the billows and waves passed over him. Even as the psalmist¹⁷ had experienced spiritually one wave of trouble after another sweeping over him, so the prophet experienced it literally. Jonah confesses that at first he fully expected death. He thought he was

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Keil, op. cit., p. 400.

¹⁷Psalm 42:8.

banished from the sphere of Jehovah's eyes, i.e., from His protection and care. The prophet had willfully withdrawn from standing in God's presence. Now God seemed to have taken him at his word. Yet Jonah was not without hope.

The thought that it was all over with him is met by the confidence of faith that he will still look to the holy temple of the Lord, that is to say, will once more approach the presence of the Lord, to worship before Him in His temple, - an assurance which recalls Psalm 5:8.¹⁸

To emphasize even more strongly that it was a miraculous deliverance that he experienced, the prophet relates in verses 5 and 6 how the waters surrounded him and "strove to penetrate at every opening," reaching even to the soul, so that it appeared to be all over with his life. "There was but a breath between him and death." The deep, the unfathomable flood of the ocean, surrounded him, holding him imprisoned on every side. Sea weed which grows at the bottom of the sea, was bound about his head.

Even near the surface of the sea where man can struggle, (it) twines round him, a peril even to the strong swimmer, entangling him often the more, the more he struggles to extricate himself from it. But to one below, powerless to struggle, it was as his winding sheet.¹⁹

Jonah sank to the bottom of the sea, to the $\square^{\prime} \gamma \cdot \gamma$ $\gamma \cdot \gamma \rho$
 "the cuttings off of the mountains," to their roots and foundations in the depth of the ocean where the mountains

¹⁸Keil, op. cit., p. 401.

¹⁹Pusey, op. cit., p. 409.

seem to be cut off by the floor of the sea. When he sank into the deep, the earth, as it were, shut its bolts behind him. The great mass and weight of water barred his return to the surface. In himself he had no power to save his life. Yet out of this grave the Lord brought up Jonah's life. When his soul was about to sink into the night of death, he turned his thoughts to Jehovah in prayer, and his prayer reached to God in His holy temple, where Jehovah is enthroned as God and King of His people.²⁰ Dr. Pusey states that the word *נִפְּשָׁה* refers to that physical exhaustion when a film comes over the eyes, and the brain is mantled over.²¹ Jonah had thought himself cast out of the presence of God, but his prayer came in unto Him and was heard.

Salvation and deliverance are to be hoped for only from Jehovah the living God. To express this thought emphatically, Jonah points now to the case of the idolaters who forfeit their Mercy. He says that they who reverence and court vain and false things, idols which are powerless to save, are in reality forsaking God Himself, who is the Fountain of mercy and goodness. But Jonah, for his part, having learned a new lesson of trust in God, expresses the hope that he may offer his sacrifices with a prayer of sincere thanksgiving and pay the vow which he had made in his distress. Whether his hope

²⁰ Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

²¹ Pusey, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

will be realized depends on God. Salvation is of the Lord. With this expression of his faith, Jonah's prayer is concluded.

The prophet's experience had accomplished its purpose; Jonah was led to repentance, and Jehovah, "by a certain divine and secret power," ordered the great fish to eject Jonah upon dry land. The shore on which the prophet was cast was, in all probability, the coast of Palestine, somewhere near Joppa.

After an indefinite period of time the word of the Lord came unto Jonah again, repeating the command: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, the large city, and proclaim unto it the proclamation which I speak unto you." Some commentators²² think that the prophet, after being delivered from the great fish, went up to Jerusalem where he paid his vows, and then perhaps returned to a settled home, either in Jerusalem or at Gathhepher, where the Lord appeared to him a second time. This is thought to be implied in the command, "Arise, go." It is argued that one who is on his way is not bidden to arise and go. Dr. Pusey suggests also that God may have allowed an interval of time to elapse, in order that the tidings

²²Ibid. See also A. R. Fausset, "Jeremiah - Malachi," A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), IV, 578.

of so great a miracle might spread far and wide.²³ However, it will be recognized that the prophet mentions none of these incidents in his narrative. As is common practise in the book, Jonah does not write of himself but of his mission only, as God taught him.

It should be noted also that the command which Jehovah gave the prophet this second time is slightly different from that of the previous occasion. In 1:2 Jonah was told: "Arise, go to Nineveh...and cry against it." $\int_7^{\prime} \int_7^{\prime} \int_7^{\prime}$ is used. Here in 3:2 the command is: "Arise, go unto Nineveh...and proclaim unto ($\int_7^{\prime} \int_7^{\prime} \int_7^{\prime}$) it..." This change of expression may be designed to give a hint of God's purpose of mercy.²⁴

When the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, he obeyed. Not again did he try to escape the call. Nineveh is described as a large city for God, i.e., it was large in God's estimation. Jehovah regarded it with interest. In terms of size, it is again described as a "city of three days journey." Accepting this measurement as referring to the circumference, it agrees with various accounts of historians such as Diodorus²⁵ that Nineveh's circumference was 480 stadia, the equivalent of a three days' journey.

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a journey of one

²³Pusey, op. cit., p. 413.

²⁴Fausset, op. cit., p. 578.

²⁵Pusey, op. cit., p. 380.

day." Some commentators have understood this to mean that the prophet walked a day's journey straight through the city before beginning to preach. However, the words וְיָצָא יוֹנָתָן do not necessarily have that meaning. More plausible is the interpretation that Jonah began his day's journey into the city, probably wandering about, and as he found a suitable place and a fitting opportunity, he uttered his warning cry. He did not necessarily continue in one straight course, but went to most frequented spots where his message would be heard. The substance of his message was: "Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The same word is used of the overthrow of Sodom, expressing the completeness of the destruction.²⁶

Moved by the preaching of Jonah, the Ninevites believed God. They recognized Jonah to be the messenger of Jehovah, who had the power to carry out His threats. Furthermore, it would seem that they had confidence in His mercy, if they repented. They humbled themselves before God. Spontaneously, without any special order from authorities, they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, a sign of deep mourning in the orient. Both young and old took part. Even the king himself, when he was informed of Jonah's coming and his proclamation, descended from his throne, laid aside his royal robe, wrapped himself in sackcloth and sat in ashes. He also issued a

royal edict, proclaiming a general fast for both man and animal. Man, oxen and sheep were to eat nothing; the cattle were not to be driven to pasture; no one was to drink water; instead all living creatures were to cover themselves with sackcloth, cry mightily unto God, and turn from their wicked ways and from all violence, with the hope that God might still relent and withhold punishment.

Some commentators of the liberal school have considered this repentance of the Ninevites so incredible that they have pointed to it as another "proof" that the book of Jonah is not to be understood as an historical account but as an allegory. But the powerful impression which Jonah's message made upon the Ninevites becomes plausible when the following circumstances are taken into account: the emotional nature of the oriental races, "the awe of one Supreme Being which is peculiar to all the heathen religions of Asia, the great esteem in which soothsaying and oracles were held in Assyria from the very earliest times,"²⁷ the sudden, dramatic appearance of a foreigner with the boldness and confidence of a prophet, denouncing the royal city for its godless ways, announcing its destruction within a brief period of time, how could that fail to make a deep impression on the people. That is particularly true when it is remembered that Jonah's mission took place, in all probability, during a time of national de-

²⁷Keil, op. cit., p. 407.

pression and crisis, when men's minds were disposed to expect calamity and were anxious to avert it.²⁸

Suspicion has been cast upon the account also because the outward signs of mourning, the sackcloth and ashes, resemble so closely those customs which were practised in Israel.

But

these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all nations of antiquity.²⁹

Even the one feature which is peculiar to the mourning of Nineveh, that the cattle also had to take part - which Dr. Bewer calls humorous - is in accord with an Asiatic custom.³⁰

Nineveh's repentance was not in vain. God took note of its deeds of mourning, and divine mercy was quickly aroused. Scripture states: "He relented of the evil which He said He would do and decided not to do it." This is an anthropopathic statement. God acted as if He repented, as if He changed His mind with regard to Nineveh and spared that wicked city.

Nineveh's repentance was not a thorough conversion to God; it made little lasting impression on Assyria's national life, but it did show at least a susceptibility on the part of the populace for the Word of God and their willingness to

²⁸Deane, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁹Keil, op. cit., p. 409.

³⁰Pusey, op. cit., p. 382.

turn and forsake their evil and wicked ways, so that God, according to His great mercy, could extend His grace to them as a consequence. God always acts thus. He not only forgives the converted man, who lays aside his sin, but He has mercy also upon the penitent who confesses and mourns over his sin, and is willing to amend.³¹

Critics have pointed out that there is no notice in the inscriptions of this "repentance" or of any change in the polytheistic worship of the Ninevites. But it should be noted that the records of this period are unusually meager and indicate a condition of depression, famine and political weakness, a national situation which seldom, if ever, is mentioned in oriental inscriptions. Assyrian monuments ordinarily record wars and national works, but not moral re-formations such as took place as a result of Jonah's mission.

When the prophet recognized that Jehovah had forgiven Nineveh, instead of rejoicing over the fact, he was greatly displeased and very angry. $\int \cdot \text{y} \text{y} \text{y} \text{y}$ "it was evil for Jonah, a great evil," i.e., it vexed and irritated him. Not merely did it displease him, otherwise $\text{y} \text{y} \text{y} \text{y} \text{y} \text{y}$ probably would have been used. His vexation then grew into anger, $\text{y} \text{y} \text{y} \text{y}$. This is what he had feared when he was still at home, that God might relent, if Nineveh repented. It was for this reason that he had fled when the Lord's com-

³¹Keil, op. cit., p. 409.

mand came to him the first time. He knew the character of God, that the Lord threatened in order to arouse sinners to repentance. He knew that God would forgive Nineveh, if the wicked city turned from its evil. And he had no desire to be the messenger who was to warn them of destruction and thus become the means of saving them.

Various reasons have been given for Jonah's vexation and anger: 1. Loss of personal prestige, if Nineveh were not destroyed; 2. Zeal for the honor of God, whose power might be questioned among the heathen if Jonah's threat were unfulfilled; 3. The prophet saw in the conversion of the Gentiles a token of the ruin of Israel, who remained impenitent; 4. A mistaken patriotism, which could not endure to see God's mercy extended to the heathen, who had opposed Israel and would oppress them even more in the future. This latter point seems to offer the most plausible reason for Jonah's anger. Luther observes: "He was hostile to the city of Nineveh and still held a Jewish and carnal view of God."³²

In his disappointment over the fact that Nineveh had been spared, he wishes he were dead and prays Jehovah to take his life from him. One is here reminded of a similar prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4, though there is a difference in the state of mind of the two prophets. Elijah wished for death because of the apparent failure of his labors to bring

³²Ibid., p. 412.

Israel back to God. Jonah, on the other hand, had become weary of life, because God had not carried out His threats against Nineveh, but had spared the city.

Jonah's anger was most unreasonable. In verse 4 of chapter 4 the prophet is represented as self-willed, prejudiced and prone to exaggerate. Jehovah, therefore, inquired of him: "Is your anger justly kindled?" The prophet should rethink the attitude he was taking. He should give thought to the impropriety of his resentment.

Then Jonah went out of Nineveh to a place east of the city. There he made himself a hut, and sat down under it in the shade, till he saw what would happen to the city. There has been much discussion concerning the time when Jonah left Nineveh. Some commentators regard ^{וַיֵּצֵא} as a pluperfect and translate the clause: "Jonah had gone out of the city." But there is nothing in the Hebrew text to indicate that Jonah left Nineveh before the forty days had elapsed. This has led some scholars to conclude that the prophet remained in Nineveh for the forty days, but when nothing occurred to indicate the immediate and speedy destruction of the city, and Jonah was reproved by Jehovah with the words: "Art thou justly angry?" the prophet seemed to have drawn the conclusion that judgment had only been postponed and might still burst upon the city, if its repentance proved to be imperfect and

temporary.³³

Jonah is shown the unreasonableness of his attitude and the justice of Jehovah's by an object lesson. God appointed a *li'q'p* to grow up over Jonah as a shade over his head, "to preserve him from his evil." The *li'q'p* was probably the ricinus or castor oil tree, which has large leaves, and whose growth is rapid, developing to a considerable height in a very few days. In the case of Jonah, God caused this shrub to grow up with miraculous rapidity, to such a height that it cast a shade upon Jonah's head, delivering him from his evil. The evil spoken of here is not the burning heat of the sun, but his vexation and disappointment. The prophet rejoiced exceedingly at the miraculous growth of the shrub, "because he probably saw therein a sign of the goodness of God and of the divine approval of his intention to wait for the destruction of Nineveh."³⁴ Dr. Bewer gives his opinion in the words: Jonah rejoiced

over its shade, but also over the tree itself which grew so rapidly. Vv. 10-11 indicate that he showed not merely selfish joy but real interest in it. And this by turning his attention away from the city to this miraculous plant, Yahweh freed Jonah from his bad humour and filled his heart with delight.³⁵

³³Ibid., p. 413. Also Deane, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁴Keil, op. cit., p. 415.

³⁵Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1912), p. 60.

But his joy was brief. With the rising of the dawn of the very next day, Jehovah ordered a worm to attack and kill the tree, so that it soon withered away; and when the sun arose, He appointed a scorching, sultry east wind, "the much-dreaded sirocco with its oppressive and exhausting heat and dust."³⁶ $\text{נָחַם} \text{ } \text{וְיָשַׁב}$, from $\text{נָחַם} \text{ } \text{וְיָשַׁב}$, "to be silent."

The sultry east wind and the sun, smiting upon Jonah's head, intensified his physical and mental distress. Exhausted by the terrible heat, he fainted. Again he became fretful and irritable and wished himself dead. The Pulpit Commentary notes that his wish for death arose from his now assured conviction that God's mercy was extended to the heathen. From the sudden withering of the gourd he concluded that he was not to remain there and see the accomplishment of his wishes, and in his intolerance he would rather die than see Nineveh converted and saved.³⁷

But God answered Jonah, as in verse 4, by inquiring whether he thought his anger was justified. Jehovah then directed the prophet's attention to the inconsistency into which he had fallen. He felt compassion for the miraculous tree that had withered, but he murmured against God because He had compassion upon the great city of Nineveh with its many thousands of living beings and spared the city for the

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Deane, op. cit., p. 81.

sake of these souls, many of whom were children, with no conception of right or wrong. If Jonah felt pity for a worthless shrub, which he neither planted, nor tended, nor caused to grow, shall God not have pity on the creatures whom He has made, and spare the city of Nineveh? Jonah had no answer for this question. As Luther states: "He was obliged to keep silence, defeated, as it were, by his own sentence." Having accomplished its purpose, the story ends abruptly. Jonah and the Israelites have been given an insight into the true nature of the compassion of the Lord, which embraces all nations with equal love.

After a close examination of the narrative, we note that it contains no direct reference to the date of composition, nor does it yield clear historical data by which the time of authorship can be ascertained with any degree of exactness. The prophecy does, however, contain words and phrases by which both liberals and conservatives seek to establish a date of composition. These will be discussed below.

Meanwhile, we shall turn our attention to the second passage in the Old Testament in which there is a reference to Jonah, namely, 2 Kings 14:25 ff. This section of Scripture brings us the added information that during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel there lived a prophet whose name was Jonah, the son of Amittai. He was born at Gath-Hepher in the tribe of Zebulun, which, according to Jerome, was located to the north of Nazareth on the road between Sepphoris and

Tiberias. Concerning his prophetic activities mention is made of the fact that he foretold that Jeroboam would succeed in his conquest against the Syrians and would restore the ancient boundaries of the kingdom.

Most scholars, both liberal and conservative, are ready to grant that the Jonah spoken of in 2 Kings 14:25 and in the prophecy which bears the same name, are identical, although a few, such as Eissfeldt, are not willing to concede even that.

The greatest disagreement, however, centers about the question whether Jonah, the son of Amittai, is the author of the book which bears his name. Opinion today is divided into two schools of thought, the liberal and the conservative. We shall consider these opinions separately.

CHAPTER III

THE OPINION OF CONSERVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP

The majority of those who may be classified as conservative are of the opinion that Jonah, the son of Amittai, who is referred to in 2 Kings 14:25 f. as prophesying at the time of Jeroboam, is not only the hero but also the author of the prophetic writing which bears the name of Jonah. In support of their position they present the following arguments:

1. The title of the book indicates that Jonah was the author. In 1:1 the prophecy begins with the familiar formula: "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amitta, saying." This is the same title and authentication which is used in such other prophetic books as Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah and Zechariah,¹ whose authorship is not disputed. This title came to be regarded as a formula implying authorship.²

2. It has been the uniform tradition of the Jewish and Christian Church that Jonah himself wrote the history of his mission to Nineveh.³ It was on the strength of this belief

¹E. B. Pusey, The Minor Prophets, A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1950), I, 373.

²L. Fuerbringer, Introduction to the Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1925), p. 99.

³Ibid.

that the book was placed into the Hebrew Canon, among the prophetic writings. Before a book was admitted into the Canon the Old Testament church insisted on knowing its author. Dr. Pusey states:

No books were admitted among the prophets but those which the arranger of the Canon believed (if this was the work of the great synagog) or (if it was the work of Ezra) knew to have been written by persons called to the prophetic office.⁴

To this Keil adds this thought:

The Book of Jonah resembles, in contents and form, the narratives of the prophets in the historical books of the Old Testament...It contains no prophetic words concerning Nineveh, but relates in simple prose the sending of Jonah to that city to foretell its destruction... If then, notwithstanding this, the compilers of the canon have placed the book among the minor prophets, this can only have been because they were firmly convinced that the Prophet Jonah was the author.⁵

Nor did Jesus and the apostles once question the position of the Jewish church as to the authorship of Jonah. On the contrary, the Savior accepted the Hebrew Canon as it existed in His day, calling it "the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."⁶ Dr. Pieper expresses it in these words:

For the Scriptures of the Old Testament we have the testimony of the Jewish Church and of Christ and His Apostles. Christian theologians of all ages are right in saying: If the Jews had been mistaken as to their canon or had falsified it, Christ would not have so

⁴Pusey, op. cit., p. 373.

⁵Carl F. Keil, "The Twelve Minor Prophets," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), I, 380.

⁶Luke 24:44.

unconditionally and without limitation pointed to the Scripture in the hands of the Jews and asserted their inviolability, as He does, e.g., in the words: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29); "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me" (Luke 24:44); "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39); "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). There is, however, no historical witness for the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. Neither the Jewish Church nor Christ recognized them as canonical.⁷

On the strength of such testimony the authorship of Jonah has not been questioned by the Christian Church until recent times, when higher criticism offers its challenge to the traditional viewpoint regarding Jonah.

3. The order in which the prophetic writings are found in the Hebrew Canon also gives some support to the fact that the ancient church considered the historical Jonah to have been the author of the book. George A. Smith, a liberal critic, concedes that the book of Jonah was placed with the early prophets because that is where compilers thought it belonged, namely, at the time of Amos and Hosea.⁸ Dr. Pusey believes that the order of the "twelve" was probably, for the most part, an order of time.⁹ Dr. Keil qualifies this some-

⁷Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 330.

⁸George A. Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (Revised edition; New York and London: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), I, 6.

⁹Pusey, op. cit., p. 10.

what by stating that the arrangement of the twelve is chronological only to this extent that

the prophets of the pre-Assyrian and Assyrian times (Hosea to Nahum) are placed first, as being the earliest; then follow those of the Chaldean period (Habakkuk and Zephaniah), and lastly, the series is closed by the three prophets after the captivity (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi).¹⁰

Jerome advanced the theory that

the prophets, in whose books the time is not indicated in the title, prophesied under the same kings as the prophets, whose books precede theirs with the date of the composition inserted.¹¹

This may not be "on a good traditional basis" but it does indicate that Jerome considered Jonah's prophecy to have been contemporaneous with Amos and Hosea.

4. The nature of Jonah's prophecy has led conservative scholars to the conclusion that Jonah was the author. The book describes the prophet with a variety of character defects, unworthy of a man of God. He is shown to be bigoted, prejudiced, selfish, disobedient to God's specific commands. Nor does the writer make any attempt to offer an explanation or excuse for his actions. When one considers the position of respect and authority which a prophet of the Most High occupied in those days, one would hardly expect a Jewish writer to expose to public view the weaknesses and failings of a man of God as is done in the book of Jonah, unless the writer

¹⁰Keil, op. cit., p. 2.

¹¹Ibid.

were the prophet himself, humbly confessing his own faults before God and man, and teaching his people a great lesson.¹² It was characteristic of the prophets, as Dr. Pusey states, that these men of God, while writing the things of God, "had a God-given indifference how they themselves would be thought of by men. They related, with the same holy unconcern, their praise or their blame."¹³ While an uninspired writer, no doubt, would have brought out the relieving points of Jonah's character and would not have left him lying under God's reproof at the close of the narrative, Jonah, on the other hand, records the plain truth about himself as St. Matthew in his Gospel relates his own desertion of the Lord among the apostles, or like St. Mark, under the direction of St. Peter, relates the unfortunate fall of the great apostle.

5. The psalm of thanksgiving, recorded in Jonah 2, bears the stamp of genuineness. The vivid and graphic expressions that appear throughout the psalm suggest at once that here is a record of real experiences, as told by an eyewitness. There are a number of original expressions such as, "I went down to the cutting off of the mountains," "the sea-weed bound around my head," "the earth, its bars around me for-

¹²W. J. Deane, "The Book of Jonah," The Pulpit Commentary, H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, editors (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), XIV, 6.

¹³Pusey, op. cit., p. 374.

ever," etc. G. A. Smith, a modern liberal, agrees that

the horror of the deep has nowhere in the Old Testament been described with such power and conciseness. So far the Psalm is not a string of quotations, but a living unity.¹⁴

The peculiar nature of the prayer is also worthy of note. An uninspired writer, attempting to supply a fitting prayer at this point, would introduce here, not a psalm of thanksgiving since Jonah is still within the fish, and as Dr. Bewer states, "To be swallowed by a fish is usually not the same as to be saved."¹⁵ Rather a later editor would be more "logical" and introduce at this point a prayer of repentance and a plea for divine help. But here Jonah does what might be expected of a prophet. Seeing that the hand of God has just rescued him from the deep in a moment when he had despaired of his life, the prophet turns to God with a prayer of thanksgiving, followed by an expression of hope that he may be permitted again to worship God in His temple.

The composition of the prayer is also what we might expect of a prophet. He is thoroughly familiar with the psalms, and in this great moment of his life "the well-remembered psalms, such as he had often used them, were brought to his mind."¹⁶ But the prayer is not a list of verses loosely

¹⁴Smith, op. cit., II, 499.

¹⁵Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1912), p. 22.

¹⁶Pusey, op. cit., p. 379.

hung together, not a mere string of quotations, but rich expressions from the psalms which he varies and amplifies according to his own special circumstances, and moulds into a "living unity."¹⁷

And when we inquire into the date of these psalms which Jonah "quoted," we find that they originated in the age of David, composed either by the son of Jesse himself or one of his contemporaries.¹⁸ Dr. Bewer, while not intending to support this point, nevertheless makes the significant remark that the Hebrew in Jonah 2 is pure with no Aramaic influence apparent.¹⁹ To the conservative these arguments are conclusive proof that the traditional point of view is the correct one, namely, Jonah is the author of the book which bears his name.

In the last century, however, the voice of liberal scholarship has been raised against this traditional viewpoint. Higher critics have presented arguments which, in their opinion, prove conclusively that the book of Jonah cannot be the work of the prophet himself but was written by an author who lived at a much later date. It is with their

¹⁷Smith, op. cit., II, 499.

¹⁸Fuerbringer, op. cit., p. 99; Keil, op. cit., p. 381; Edward J. Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament (Second edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 258.

¹⁹Bewer, op. cit., p. 23.

opinion that we shall now concern ourselves in Chapter IV.

THE THEORY OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

While discussing a portion of the vast literature that has been written in recent years by liberal scholars, we frequently come upon the thought that while much has been said about the theory of the state, we have not heard much about the theory of the individual. It is true that a great deal has been said about the individual in connection with the theory of the state, but this has been said in a way that is not very helpful. The individual is often treated as a mere object of the state's action, and not as a subject with rights and duties of his own. This is a mistake, for the individual is the basis of the state, and without him the state would be meaningless. The theory of the individual is therefore a necessary part of the theory of the state, and it is to this theory that we now turn.

1. The first question that arises in our mind is: What is the individual? The answer to this question is: The individual is a human being, a being who is capable of thought and feeling, and who is entitled to the same respect and consideration as any other human being. The individual is not a mere object, but a subject, and as such he has rights and duties of his own. These rights and duties are not given by the state, but are inherent in the individual himself. The state is merely an organization of individuals, and its purpose is to protect the rights and interests of its members. If the state fails to do this, it is no longer a state, but a mere tyranny.

John A. Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (London, 1651), and Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (London, 1651), are two of the most famous writers who have written about the theory of the individual. Hobbes is a great authority on this subject, and his views are worth studying.

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CHAPTER IV

THE OPINION OF LIBERAL SCHOLARSHIP

While examining a portion of the vast literature that has been written in recent years by liberal scholars, one frequently comes upon the thought that while Jonah may have been the hero of the prophecy, he could not have been its author.¹ It is therefore a story about him, not by him. Basing their arguments especially on internal evidence, they conclude that the book of Jonah was composed by an unknown author who lived in post-exilic times. That Jonah himself could not have been the author seems evident to them for the following reasons.

1. The book nowhere claims to have been written by Jonah.² The fact that the narrative is written in the third person seems to indicate that someone other than the prophet himself is the author. Nor does the story give proof of coming from an eyewitness of the adventures which it describes, nor even from a contemporary of the prophet.³ On the contrary,

¹Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1912), p. 11.

²Ibid.

³George A. Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (Revised edition; New York and London: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), II, 486.

many details of the story are lacking, details which a historian and particularly an eyewitness would include, such as the name of the king of Assyria, the shore on which Jonah was cast after his experience with the fish, a description of the prophet's trip to Nineveh, and what he did after his mission was concluded. In fact, say the liberals, when the author does give details, they are often inaccurate, e.g., the size of the city of Nineveh, described as a journey of three days. All of this would indicate, in their opinion, that Jonah could not have been the author, nor could any contemporary of his.

2. A late date is argued also from the language of the book. It is claimed that the writer uses words and phrases which are common in post-Biblical Hebrew and in Old Testament writings which are recognized to be of late date.⁴ In support of this contention critics point to such "alleged aramaisms" as לִיְיָ , "to think," 1:4. It is claimed by Oesterley and Robinson that "to think" is never used of inanimate objects like a ship in classical Hebrew.⁵ The same critics call attention to לְיָמֵי הַיָּם , translated "mariners" in 1:5, which, they say, is Aramaic and is never found in classical Hebrew, but is common in the Talmud and in Mid-

⁴W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 372.

⁵Ibid.

raschic works.⁶ In the same verse is the word שִׁיב used in the Mishnah and the Gemara in the sense of ship and therefore called an Aramaism. The Hebrew word is שִׁיב . In 1:7,12 שִׁיב and שִׁיב are used instead of the Hebrew שִׁיב . שִׁיב is used in only one other place in the Old Testament, that is, Eccl. 8:17, a book which is considered by many to be of late date. שִׁיב meaning "to be calm" in 1:11-12, is "Neo-Hebrew, occurring in the Old Testament in late passages only, Prov. 26:20; Ps. 107:30. It is the usual word in late Hebrew, and is common in the Talmud and Midrash."⁷ In 3:2 שִׁיב , translated "preaching," never occurs elsewhere in the Bible, but it is common in post-Biblical Hebrew. שִׁיב in the sense "to order or command," 3:7, is found in the Old Testament only in the Aramaic passages, Dan. 3:10; Ezra 6:1, etc.,⁸ also common in the Talmud. שִׁיב in the Piel is a favorite of the author; he uses it in 2:1 and 4:6,8, but it is used elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Dan. 1:5,10; 1 Chron. 9:29; Ps. 61:8; but in Old Testament Aramaic שִׁיב , Piel שִׁיב occurs frequently.⁹ שִׁיב in 4:11 for the earlier שִׁיב is used only in later Hebrew, Ezra 2:64; Neh.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Smith, op. cit., p. 487.

⁹Ibid.

7:66,72; 1 Chron. 29:7 (Hosea 8:12, Kethibh is suspected).

סִינִי in 3:3 describes Nineveh as a city that had existed long ago in the past but since had been destroyed. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., hence the book must be dated after 606.¹⁰

In addition to these there are other words which have been called Aramaisms, but to enumerate all would carry us too far afield.

3. Another argument which liberal scholarship uses in support of a late date for the book of Jonah is that the author shows a familiarity with certain Old Testament passages which were written after the time of Jonah and some even later than the exile. For example, the author knew the story of Elijah's flight to Horeb (1 Kings 19), for he seems to have modeled chapter 4 after it.¹¹ In chapter 4, verse 3, Jonah makes the plea: "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live," and in 1 Kings 19:4 Elijah also prayed: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." According to Pfeiffer, the first edition of the book of Kings was made about 600 B.C., almost two hundred years after the time of Jonah.

Furthermore, the author shows a familiarity with the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 486.

¹¹Bewer, op. cit., p. 61.

teaching of Jeremiah 18:7-12,¹² especially verses 7 and 8 where God makes the pronouncement: "At what instance I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto it." Jeremiah lived and worked at the time of the exile. According to Oesterley and Robinson the book of Jeremiah was compiled probably around the fourth century B.C.

The author of Jonah also knew Deutero-Isaiah's teaching of monotheism in its universal application, and is intent on inculcating it by his story.¹³

But liberal critics consider even more important, parallels between Jonah and Joel. In Jonah 3:9 we read: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not." This is similar to Joel 2:14a: "Who knoweth if He will return and repent." Jonah 4:2 lists the attributes of God in these words: "A gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Liberals such as Pfeiffer, Cornill, Calkins, etc. date the book of Joel around 350 B.C. and some assume that Jonah made use of Joel.¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 12.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Raymond Calkins, The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, c.1947), p. 166.

In setting the date of Jonah modern scholars have also noted the parallels between the prayer of thanksgiving in chapter 2 and passages in the psalms. Ps. 120:1: "In my distress I cried unto the Lord and He heard me," uses the same phraseology as verse 3a: "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me." Ps. 42:8b: "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me," parallels verse 4b very closely, "All thy billows and thy waves pass over me."

Psalm 31:23: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes; nevertheless Thou heardst the voice of my supplication when I cried unto Thee" suggests a thought similar to verse 5: "Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple."

Psalm 69:1-2: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul...I am come into deep water where the floods overflow me" is somewhat parallel to verse 6: "Waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about; the weeds were wrapped about my head."

Psalm 30:4: "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit" is quite similar to verse 7: "Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God."

Psalm 142:4: "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me" and Psalm 143:4: "Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me" are similar to verse 8: "When my soul fainted

within me."

Psalm 18:7b: "He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him" parallels verse 8: "My prayer came in unto Thee, unto Thy holy temple."

Psalm 5:8: "toward Thy holy temple" is the same expression as is used in verse 8: "unto Thy holy temple."

Psalm 88:3: "Let my prayer come before Thee" is the same expression as verse 8: "And my prayer came in unto Thee."

Psalm 31:7: "I have hated them that regard lying vanities" parallels verse 9a: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies."

Psalm 50:13: "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High" expresses a thought similar to verse 10: "But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that I have vowed."

What conclusions do modern scholars draw from these parallels? Bewer says that

these literary connections...prove...that the author was steeped in the religious language of the post-exilic community...These phrases it (chapter 2) has in common with other psalms were the common property of the religious language of the author's day.¹⁵

It is therefore the opinion of the liberal scholars that the parallels "between Jonah and various postexilic psalms argue

¹⁵Bewer, op. cit., p. 24.

for a postexilic date of the psalm."¹⁶

4. A late date for the book of Jonah is also argued from its religious content. It is said that Jonah presents religious ideas that are far in advance of those in the eighth century. "The book...is a protest against the narrow, nationalistic, vindictive attitude of the Jewish people toward the heathen nations."¹⁷ "It gives expression to the loftiest and most spiritual ideals that had ever entered into the consciousness of the Hebrew people."¹⁸

God's mercy...is not limited to Israel but embraces all people. The only condition for reconciliation with Him for any nation is sincere repentance. This is the great lesson of the story.¹⁹

Such religious ideas belong in a later period of Jewish history, it is said.

But, if Jonah is not the author, what date do critics assign to the book of Jonah, and to whom do they give credit for its composition? They make no attempt to supply the name of the author, since they admit that not enough specific information is available; but there is general agreement among those who accept an author other than Jonah that the book was

¹⁶Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁷Calkins, op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁹Julius A. Bewer, "Book of the Twelve Prophets," Harper Annotated Bible Series (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), II, 95.

written in post-exilic times. Opinions vary, however, in determining the actual century. Kleinert assigns the book to the Exile; Ewald, to the fifth or sixth century; Driver, to the fifth; Orelli, to the last Chaldean or first Persian age; Pfeiffer, second half of the fourth century; Oesterley and Robinson, 350 B.C.; Beyer, about 400 B.C.; Vatke, the third century. Among those who simply assign it to post-exilic times are the following: Koenig, Cheyne, W. R. Smith, Kuenen, Wildeboer, Budde, Cornill, Farrar, etc. Hitzig developed the novel idea that the book of Jonah originated in Egypt in the Maccabean age. Thus, while there is general agreement, there is some difference of opinion also regarding the precise time of composition.

Modern scholars, furthermore, claim that conditions in the post-exilic period were such as would very probably give rise to a literary work like the book of Jonah. They point out that after the exile there were two opposing schools of thought within the Jewish nation taking opposite views with regard to Israel's future, "and the obstacle which heathendom interposed between Israel and the future." They were the particularists and the universalists. The particularists held the opinion "that God's kingdom could not be established save by the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world." On the other hand, the universalists "felt that Israel's mission to the world was not one of war, but of service in these high truths of God (namely, the universal Fatherhood of God) and

of His Grace committed to herself."²⁰ It is the opinion of some²¹ that there was a bitter struggle between these two schools of thought, a struggle which was still going on at the time of Christ; and it is thought that such books as Esther and Obadiah present the particularist point of view, demanding the overthrow of the heathen, while the book of Jonah represents the other side of the argument, that of the universalists.

G. A. Smith calls this view ingenious and plausible; still he does not agree that it is "a product of mere polemic. The book is too simple and grand for that."²² He leans rather to the view that, in writing the book of Jonah, the author had in mind not merely a Jewish party but all of Israel, because the nation was so hesitant about fulfilling its God-given mission in the world. Jonah is a type of the Israelite people who fled from the duty which God had placed upon them, and as a result were cast for a period of time into a living death (the exile); but even there they did not learn the lesson God would teach them; having been rescued, they still hesitate to believe that God has any fate for the heathen but destruction.

But both of these views raise a number of questions,

²⁰Smith, op. cit., p. 490.

²¹Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., p. 375.

²²Smith, op. cit., p. 491.

which liberals quickly recognize and seek to answer as well as they are able. First, why should Jonah have been chosen as the hero of the narrative? If the author was writing for post-exilic Israel, why did he select an eighth century prophet as his persona dramatis? If scholars can find the answer to that question, it will greatly strengthen their case; by the same token, failure to discover the reason, correspondingly weakens their argument. A number of prominent liberals have wrestled, therefore, with the problem.

Oesterley and Robinson follow this line of reasoning: The prophet Jonah, as a historical character spoken of in 2 Kings 15, lived in that period of history when Assyria, fast becoming a leading world power, came into direct contact with Israel for the first time, and with dire consequences to the people of God. Because of this unique contact between Jonah and Assyria, which applied to no other prophet, the author may have used the name of Jonah. Furthermore, they say that

the name Jonah means "dove" and Nineveh, the city to which he goes, was the chief sanctuary of the goddess Ishtar whose sacred bird was the dove. It is possible that the writer of our book wished to place in contrast Jonah, the dove sent by Yahweh, the God of Israel, and the dove sacred to the tutelar goddess of the city.²³

Bewer concedes that it is difficult to tell why Jonah was taken as the hero of the story, but then, in a general

²³Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., p. 375.

way, he follows a line of thought similar to Oesterley, with this variation, however: Jonah means dove, and the dove had become a symbolic name for Israel, cf. Hosea 7:11; 11:11, etc., where Ephraim is compared to a dove. When the author needed a representative name for all of Israel, he found "Jonah" suitable for his purposes.²⁴

Calkins makes the flat statement that the writer of the book took Jonah as the hero of his tale possibly "because the historical Jonah was such an intense nationalist."²⁵

G. A. Smith goes into greater details than most other writers, discussing the possibility that there might have been a tradition extant, in post-exilic times, concerning a journey by Jonah to Nineveh. It is known that other prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, took God's word to Syria. Or might there have been some discourse which Jonah made against the great city of Nineveh. Smith conjectures that a tradition might have served as the nucleus of fact around which a post-exilic author built his story. Finally, Smith admits ignorance of the reasons which led the author to select Jonah as the type of Israel. He concludes: "We can only conjecture that it may have been because Jonah was a prophet whom history identified with Israel's narrower interests."²⁶

²⁴Bewer, The International Critical Commentary, p. 8.

²⁵Calkins, op. cit., p. 167.

²⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 493.

A second question which suggests itself in this discussion is: Why did the author choose Nineveh as the city to which Jonah was sent to preach? Liberal scholars answer this question by pointing to the fact that the Assyrians were the bitterest enemies of Israel in pre-exilic times. Nineveh was its capital. The author, wanting to teach that even the cruel Assyrians were objects of God's care, found in Nineveh a very suitable illustration of his universalistic teachings.²⁷

On the basis of the arguments listed above, modern scholars break with the tradition held by the Jewish and Christian churches for many centuries, and conclude that Jonah could not have been the author of the book; instead the writing which bears his name must be assigned to an unknown author who lived in post-exilic times, when Aramaic was being spoken by the Jewish populace, when Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, had already for many years been a buried city, around which legends had grown up as to its original size; and finally, a time when the people of Israel had become so embittered by the exile that they held the narrow view that all heathen were excluded from the kingdom of God.

²⁷Bewer, The International Critical Commentary, p. 28.

CHAPTER V

THE OPINION OF LIBERAL SCHOLARSHIP REEXAMINED

At first glance, the position taken by liberal scholarship may seem to be impregnable. Their arguments appear logical; their method of reasoning, point by point, is most clever. But on closer examination one finds that many of their arguments are based upon a twofold premise, with which conservative scholars are in total disagreement. In the first place, one gains the impression that liberals base their theory upon the premise that, since the author is relating a narrative which contains elements of a miraculous nature, it simply cannot be a record of historical events, and Jonah cannot be relating eyewitness experiences. That is apparent from such statements as the following in which Bewer complains:

At almost every step the reader who takes the story as a record of actual happenings must ask questions. How was it possible that a true prophet should disobey a direct divine command? Is it likely that God should send a storm simply in order to pursue a single person and thus cause many others to suffer too? Do such things happen in a world like ours? Is it not curious that the lot should fall upon Jonah at once, and evidently without manipulation on the part of the sailors, and that the sea should become calm directly after he had been thrown overboard? That the great fish was at once ready to swallow Jonah may be passed, but that Jonah should have remained in the fish for three days and three nights and should have prayed a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving inside, exceeds the limits of credibility, not to mention the point that the fish did not simply eject him but threw him up on the shore... And what a wonderful result followed his preaching?...

And what shall we say of the extraordinary speedy growth of the plant?...It is all passing strange. We are in wonderland! Surely this is not the record of actual historical events..."¹

Such statements as this certainly prove the contention that liberal scholarship begins with the premise that in this physical world such miracles as are related in the book of Jonah simply do not happen. When such experiences are related, the account cannot be interpreted literally, but another explanation must be found. But such a premise is false since the Scripture itself testifies: "With God nothing shall be impossible," as well as numerous other passages which declare that God can regulate even nature itself in the interest of His people.

The second premise upon which liberal scholarship operates is the theory that the Holy Scripture is simply a history of the religious beliefs of the Jewish nation, in which there are presumably numerous errors, glosses, etc. The conservatives, on the other hand, regard the Bible to be the infallible, divinely inspired record of God's dealings with His people, as He prepared for them and the world of mankind a great salvation in Christ Jesus. For the Scripture testifies that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And in the words of Jesus Himself: "The

¹Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1912), p. 3 f.

Scripture cannot be broken."

Hence, the two schools of thought, the liberal and the conservative, have little common ground on which to stand.

But proceeding now to the individual arguments advanced by liberal scholars in Chapter IV, we find, first of all, the assertion made that the book nowhere claims to have been written by Jonah. Such a statement is made in total disregard of 1:1 where it is specifically stated: "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying." As noted above,² this title came to be regarded as a formula implying authorship. But if this formula is rejected as insufficient evidence in the case of Jonah, then on what grounds can liberal scholars credit Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zechariah, etc., with the books which bear their names; for, in a general way, the same formula is used in those cases as in Jonah's. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that liberal scholars such as Oesterley and Robinson have conceded that "it is evident that we are intended to understand by the Jonah of this Book the prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. This would indicate a date for the book soon after 800 B.C."³

Critics have endeavored to throw doubt on the genuineness of the book also because it is written in the third

²Supra, p. 28.

³W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 372.

person. But there is nothing particularly unusual about an author telling his experiences in the third person. Both classical and Biblical writers have followed the same practice. Xenophon's "Anabasis" as well as the "Commentaries" of Caesar are written in the third person, yet the genuineness of these literary works have never been questioned. There are many passages in other prophets where the same usage may be found, e.g., Amos 7:12; Isaiah 7:3; 20:2-3; Jeremiah 20:1-3; 26:7; Daniel 1-7; Haggai 1:1,3,12; 2:1,10,20.

The fact that the prophet Jonah does not say on what shore he was cast forth, what he did on his long journey to Nineveh, or what the name of the Assyrian king was, the lack of these details certainly does not indicate that he was unfamiliar with them. It is wholly unwarranted to argue thus from silence. Keil makes the pertinent observation:

There is not a single one of the ancient historians in whose works such completeness as this can be found; still less do Biblical historians aim at communicating such things as have no close connection with the main object of their narrative, or with the religious significance of the facts themselves.⁴

Jonah speaks of himself only to the extent that his actions have any relation to his mission. He does not tell the king's name, because that was not as important in the accomplishing of his main purpose as were the king's deeds. Jonah

⁴Carl F. Keil, "The Twelve Minor Prophets," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), I, 381.

was not as interested in merely writing a detailed history as he was in recording divine truth and in teaching a God-inspired lesson.

Nor is it unusual that he should be designated simply as "the king of Nineveh," where he had his capital. The Israelites, on other occasions, followed the same practise. In 2 Chron. 24:23 Benhadad, king of Syria, is referred to as the king of Damascus. And in 1 Kings 21:1 (R.V.) Ahab, king of Israel, is called the king of Samaria. Both of these kings were so well known that their personal names did not require mention. The same possibly was true of the king of Assyria, whose name undoubtedly was known to the Israelites of that day, so that Jonah could simply call him "the king of Nineveh."

The description of Nineveh as "a city of three days' journey" (3:3) need not be regarded as an inaccuracy. E. J. Young offers two possible explanations: 1. It is possibly "nothing more than a rough expression to indicate that the city was a large one." 2. "It is furthermore possible that this designation of the city as a 'journey of three days' had reference, not to the diameter of the city proper, but to the complex of villages which clustered about Nineveh."⁵ Pusey thinks that this obviously refers to the circumference of

⁵Edward J. Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament (Second edition; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 255.

what might be called greater Nineveh, consisting of the following communities: Ancient Nineveh, Nimrud, Kouyunjik, Khorsabad and Karamless. In support of this opinion Pusey quotes Diodorus who described Nineveh as follows: "It was well-walled of unequal lengths. Each of the longer sides was 150 furlongs; each of the shorter, 90. The whole circumference being 480 furlongs (60 miles)." To which Dr. Pusey adds: "The 60 miles of Diodorus exactly correspond with the three days' journey of Jonah."⁶

Critics lay particular emphasis on the so-called Aramaisms that are found in the book of Jonah, arguing that they indicate a late date. But the presence of Aramaisms in the book of Jonah cannot be considered a proper criterion for determining the date of composition, since it is impossible to know just at what time certain isolated Aramaic words crept into the Hebrew language.⁷ Aramaic elements appear even in early books, particularly in the early literature of the northern kingdom.⁸ Young calls attention to the fact that the recently discovered texts from Ras Shamra also contain

⁶E. B. Pusey, The Minor Prophets, A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1950), I, 380.

⁷G. Ch. Aalders, The Problem of the Book of Jonah (London: Tyndale Press, 1948), p. 11.

⁸Young, op. cit., p. 255; John D. Davis, A Dictionary of the Bible (Fourth edition; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1934), p. 406.

Aramaic elements (c. 1400-1500 B.C.).⁹ Oesterley and Robinson make the concession that as early as the reign of Hezekiah (725-696 B.C.) a knowledge of the Aramaic language was existent in Palestine, judging from Isaiah 36:11 and 2 Kings 18:26.¹⁰ It should certainly not be considered unusual, therefore, if Aramaisms are found in the writings of Jonah's day, especially in view of the fact that there certainly must have been decades of close commercial and political contacts between Israel and the Arameans of Damascus prior to and during the prophetic ministry of Jonah.

Modern scholarship claims to find in the book of Jonah Aramaic words and phrases which indicate a late date. But, as this chapter will endeavor to prove, an investigation of these alleged Aramaisms will show that most of them are expressions derived from genuine Hebrew words.

1. It is claimed, for instance, that לְחַמּוֹת , "to think" (1:4), is never used of an inanimate object like a ship in classical Hebrew. It must be remembered, however, that Jonah employs a very picturesque style throughout his writing, especially in his account of the storm. Note, for example, the following expressions that are peculiar to Jonah: "The Lord cast forth ($\text{שָׁלַח$) a strong wind," 1:4; "the sea may be hushed" ($\text{פָּחַד$), 1:11; "the wind was

⁹Young, op. cit., p. 255.

¹⁰Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., p. 373.

going and tossing" ($\text{ג} \text{ו} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$), as with a whirlwind, 1:11; the men "plowed" or "dug" ($\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$) in rowing, 1:13; "the sea stood from it raging" ($\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$), 1:15; "let men and beast clothe themselves with sackcloth" ($\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$), 3:8. It is therefore characteristic of Jonah's style that he should use such a statement as "the ship thought to be broken" ($\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$).¹¹

Pusey supplies this additional thought:

Perhaps Jonah means by this very vivid image to exhibit the more his own dullness. He ascribes, as it were, to the ship a sense of its own danger, as she heaved and rolled and creaked and quivered under the weight of the storm which lay on her, and her masts groaned, and her yard-arms shivered. To the awakened conscience everything seems to have been alive to God's displeasure, except itself.¹²

2. Critics call attention also to $\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$, translated "mariners" in 1:5, which, they claim, is Aramaic and is never found in classical Hebrew, but is common in the Talmud and Midraschic works. This word, however, need cause no difficulty. It is a genuine Hebrew term derived from $\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$, "salt sea." It is formed exactly as other Hebrew words denoting occupation. Perhaps it does not occur in earlier books, because seamen are not mentioned earlier.

3. The word $\text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז} \text{ז}$ (1:5) is used in the Mishnah and in the Gemara in the sense of a ship. It does not occur

¹¹Pusey, op. cit., p. 377.

¹²Ibid., p. 400.

elsewhere in the Old Testament. Still that does not indicate conclusively that it is an Aramaism. סִי'בֹּב is a genuine Hebrew word from כִּבֵּב , "to cover." Literally then, it may mean "the covered part of the ship" or "a decked vessel." That agrees also with verse 5b where it is said that Jonah went below deck, "into the sides of the ship."¹³ The common Hebrew word for ship is סִי'בֹּב . In this and previous verses when Jonah did not need to include the thought that the vessel was decked, he used the regular term סִי'בֹּב . Thus the fact that both words are used in verse 5 might indicate that there is this difference in meaning.

Nor is it surprising that this expressive term סִי'בֹּב does not appear in earlier writings. Perhaps this is the first occasion for mentioning a decked vessel. Israel's interests centered chiefly upon their home land rather than upon the sea.¹⁴

4. In dispute is also the word חֲשַׁבְתִּי (1:6) meaning "thought" or "proposed." It is claimed that this is a "decisive" Aramaism, used in place of the common Hebrew verb חָשַׁב . This, however, is an old Hebrew word. The root occurs in Job 12:5, in Psalm 146:4, and in Deuteronomy 1:3. Aalders states the opinion that since it does not occur at

¹³Bewer, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁴Pusey, op. cit., p. 375; Aalders, op. cit., p. 11.

all in Syriac, but is found in some of the Targums, the Aramaic may have taken it over from the Hebrew.¹⁵

5. Attention has been called to the expression לֹא־יָדָע , used in 1:7,12 instead of the Hebrew $\text{לֹא־יָדָעָה$. It is said that this use of יָדָע for $\text{יָדָעָה$ became common in later Hebrew under Aramaic influence. While it is true that the expression which Jonah uses in 1:7,12, לֹא־יָדָע , occurs only in one other place in the Old Testament, that can hardly be considered decisive proof of a post-exilic date, especially in view of the fact that יָדָע for $\text{יָדָעָה$ occurs frequently, in other word-combinations, in early Biblical Hebrew.¹⁶ At the same time, יָדָע for $\text{יָדָעָה$ does not occur at all in such late books as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, or the six later minor prophets.¹⁷

It should also be noted that יָדָע occurs frequently in dialogue, which may well be expected, since there is a strong tendency in all languages to abridge forms in the spoken word. This may also apply to the use of לֹא־יָדָע by Jonah in 1:7,12. In each case Jonah is conversing with the Phoenician mariners.

¹⁵Aalders, *op. cit.*, p. 12. It is also interesting to note that לֹא־יָדָעָה is a word used not by Jonah, the Israelite, but by the ship master.

¹⁶Judges 5:7; 6:17; 7:12; 8:26; 2 Kings 6:11; Psalm 122:3-4; 124:1,6; 133:2-3; 144:15. All of these are psalms ascribed to David.

¹⁷Pusey, *op. cit.*, p. 376; Aalders, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

6. Modern critics assert that פָּנֵי , "to be calm," 1:11-12, is Neo-Hebrew, occurring in the Old Testament only in late passages, i.e., Psalm 107:30 and Proverbs 26:20. While it may be true that Psalm 107 is post-exilic, Proverbs 26:20 certainly is not. This latter passage might well be a proverb from the hand of Solomon himself,¹⁸ which the "men of Hezekiah" collected.¹⁹ Here again it is utterly impossible to know exactly at what time individual words found their way into the Hebrew language.

7. It is said that שִׁנְיָה in 3:2, translated "preaching," is further evidence that Jonah was written after the exile, since שִׁנְיָה never occurs elsewhere in the Bible, but is common in post-Biblical Hebrew. But it must be kept in mind that this word is derived from the Hebrew word שָׁנָה which is very common in Biblical Hebrew. Hardly can it be classified as an Aramaism.

8. דִּקְרוֹן in the sense of an edict of the king, 3:7, may be a non-Hebrew word. But the use of this term does not necessarily point to the post-exilic age. It probably was a technical term, which Jonah heard in Nineveh when the decree went forth from the king that there should be a period of

¹⁸Franz Delitzsch, "Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), I, 7.

¹⁹Prov. 25:1.

mourning. Jonah then used the same technical expression when he wrote of his experiences.

9. Liberals appeal to the word שָׁרָף , 2:1; 4:6,8, which, they say, is used elsewhere in the Old Testament only in late Hebrew, Daniel 1:5,10; 1 Chron. 9:29. But it also appears in Psalm 61:8, which is a Psalm of David.

10. Likewise, they claim that יָרֵב , "ten thousand," used in 4:11 for the earlier שֶׁבַע שָׁבָעִים , appears only in late Hebrew, Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66,72; 1 Chronicles 29:7. While it is true that in the Pentateuch, Judges, Samuel, and Song of Solomon, the word שֶׁבַע שָׁבָעִים is consistently used. But יָרֵב does appear in a Psalm of David²⁰ and in Hosea 8:12, who was a contemporary of Jonah.²¹

11. Perhaps the weakest argument of all is that which centers in שָׂרָף שָׂרָף (3:3) which, it is claimed, describes Nineveh as a city already destroyed when the book was written. But the statement: "Nineveh was (שָׂרָף שָׂרָף) an exceeding great city" neither proves that Nineveh no longer existed, nor does it in any way indicate that the size of Nineveh was unknown to the readers. שָׂרָף שָׂרָף is the synchronistic perfect, similar to the form as it appears in Genesis 1:2, "And the earth was without form and void." It simply means that when Jonah went to Nineveh, it was a great city.

²⁰Psalm 68:17.

²¹In Hosea 8:12 a kethibh is attached to יָרֵב .

Thus, after careful investigation, it is apparent that the so-called Aramaisms are by no means proofs of a later age. A few of these words are naval terms, and "since Israel was no seafaring people, it is in harmony with the history, that these terms should first occur in the first prophet who left the land of his mission by sea."²² Another is a technical term, which Jonah heard in Nineveh and embodied into his prophetic writing. Others are words, which, though in common use in post-exilic times, are not confined to that period but also occur as early as David. Still others are clearly derived from genuine Hebrew root forms. Hence, the evidence based on the language of the book is not sufficient to settle the question of the date.

But what of the argument that the author shows a familiarity with certain Old Testament passages, which were written after the time of Jonah and some even later than the exile? Here critics refer in particular to the following instances.

1. The author knew the story of Elijah's flight to Horeb, for he seems to have modeled Chapter 4 after it. But the book of Kings which records this story did not appear until about the middle of the sixth century,²³ two hundred years after the time that Jonah prophesied.

²²Pusey, op. cit., p. 376.

²³L. Fuerbringer, Introduction to the Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1925), p. 38.

It would be difficult to prove that Jonah modeled his fourth chapter after the story of Elijah's depression, though the prayers of the two prophets are very similar. But even if it were true, hardly would it be proof that the book of Jonah was not written until after the book of Kings. For prior to the sixth century there certainly were primary sources²⁴ which undoubtedly recorded such narratives as those of Elijah. It is unthinkable that Jonah, the prophet, was not acquainted with the life of Elijah, aside from the book of Kings.

2. The author shows a familiarity with the teachings of Jeremiah 18:7-12 where the Lord makes the pronouncement that if a nation turn from its evil ways, Jehovah will relent and not destroy it.

Undoubtedly, Jonah did have a knowledge of this teaching, for he states in 4:2: "I know that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." But it does not follow that he necessarily learned these truths from Jeremiah. This teaching that God is gracious had been expressed already in Exodus 34:6 in terms remarkably similar to the phraseology used by Jonah; and in Psalm 86:5, which is a Psalm of David. Nor was it a new doctrine that the gentile nations would also participate in the blessedness of the people of God, for it had

²⁴1 Kings 11:41; 14:29.

been made known already to Abraham, when Yahweh promised:

"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."²⁵

The universality of God's grace then, of course, reached its highest expression in Isaiah, especially the latter part.

3. The author also knew Deutero-Isaiah's teaching of monotheism in its universal application.

This entire argument is based on the supposition that the so-called Deutero-Isaiah section was not the product of the prophet Isaiah's pen, but was composed by an unknown author who lived during the latter part of the Exile. But conservative scholars are not ready to concede that point chiefly because in the eyes of the New Testament, and even of Jesus Himself, Isaiah was the author of the entire prophecy.²⁶ If one accepts the unity of the book, there is no problem, because the prophets Isaiah and Jonah were contemporaries, both servants of the same God.

4. There are parallels between Jonah and Joel.²⁷ Liberal critics consider this most important in establishing the date of Jonah's prophecy, since they assume that Joel was written about 350 B.C., and the author of Jonah made use of expressions found in Joel.

²⁵Genesis 22:18.

²⁶Young, *op. cit.*, p. 202 f.

²⁷Compare Jonah 3:9 and Joel 2:14a; also Jonah 4:2 and Joel 2:13.

Conservatives raise two objections to this line of reasoning. 1. In cases of parallels it is always difficult to determine which is the original. There are parallels also between Amos and Joel.²⁸ Which was first? 2. It cannot be proven that the prophecy of Joel was written as late as 350 B.C. The strongest arguments favor a date in the reign of Joash, near the beginning of the eighth century. If that is true, the problem raised by the critics disappears.

5. There are parallels between Jonah 2:2-9 and the psalms.²⁹ Liberal critics are of the opinion that Jonah quotes from post-exilic psalms, which argues for a post-exilic date for the book of Jonah.

But again the facts in the case do not bear out their contention, for Jonah 2:2-9 "contains reminiscences of many psalms which by their titles are attributed to David and of others which are from his time."³⁰

6. It is argued that Jonah could not have written the book which bears his name because it contains religious ideas far in advance of those in the eighth century.

²⁸ Joel 3:6 and Amos 1:2; Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13.

²⁹ Jonah 2:3a and Ps. 120:1; Jonah 2:4b and Ps. 42:8b; Jonah 2:5 and Ps. 31:23; Jonah 2:6 and Ps. 69:1-2; Jonah 2:7 and Ps. 30:4; Jonah 2:8 and Ps. 142:4; Jonah 2:8 and Ps. 18:7b; Jonah 2:8 and Ps. 5:8; Jonah 2:8 and Ps. 88:3; Jonah 2:9a and Ps. 31:7; Jonah 2:10 and Ps. 50:13.

³⁰ Young, op. cit., p. 258; Fuerbringer, op. cit., p. 99; Keil, op. cit., p. 381.

The same arguments apply here as were presented above on page 62, point 2. It is apparent from such arguments as these that liberal scholarship considers the theory of progressive revelation a proper standard by which the age of a book may be determined. Conservatives, on the contrary, regard this to be an unwarranted assumption. Consequently, it is their opinion that the universalistic ideas expressed in the book of Jonah

are in perfect keeping with the universalistic emphasis which appears throughout the Old Testament. This emphasis appears as early as Genesis 9:27. There is no objective warrant for regarding such teachings as characteristic of post-exilic times alone.³¹

7. Finally, do modern scholars rest their case on a sound historical basis, when they claim that conditions in the post-exilic world were such as would very probably give rise to a literary work like the book of Jonah?

At the outset it must be recognized that history gives little direct assistance either to the conservative or liberal school of thought. But the position held by modern scholarship, for the most part, is based on theories, suppositions, and probabilities.³² While there may have been particularists and universalists within the Jewish nation after the exile, there is nothing in history, nothing in tradition,

³¹Young, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

³²Compare page 44. This situation has led to differences of opinion among the scholars themselves.

nothing in the apocryphal writings, nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this was the occasion which prompted a post-exilic prophet to write the book of Jonah. Critics are therefore unable to give the name of the writer or even furnish a satisfactory answer to the important question why the author selected an ancient prophet to be the hero of his story, and Nineveh, an enemy out of the far distant past, as the recipient of his message.

But does history support the opinion held by conservative scholars? In answering that question it will be necessary to review briefly the highlights in the history of Israel and Assyria, particularly the political relationship which existed between these two countries in the eighth and ninth centuries before Christ.

In the far past Assyria, for a time, had been a dominating force in the middle east, but after 1100 B.C. and for nearly two centuries and a half, apparently there was little contact between Palestine and this once powerful state toward the east. In 883 B.C., however, Ashur-nasirpal II came to the throne of Assyria. Soon he had developed his army into a ruthless fighting machine that was intended to strike terror into the hearts of his foes. In his annals he boasts continuously of his merciless cruelty:

I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them, with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. With the rest of them I darkened the gullies and precipices of the mountains. I carried off their spoil and their

possessions. The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city, their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire.³³

In the year 870 Ashur-nasir-pal received tribute from Tyre and Sidon. But no mention is made either in Biblical records or Assyrian sources regarding the fate of Omri, who was the king of Israel at that time. It does seem possible, however, that some contact was made, for during more than a century and a half after Omri's death, the land of Israel was known to the Assyrians as "Bit-Humria," the house of Omri. Even in Sargon's time (722-705) it was still called by that name.

When Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) came to the throne of Assyria, he used his father's military machine in repeated campaigns against Syria and Palestine. He boasted: "In my first year of reign I crossed the Euphrates at its flood. To the shore of the sea of the setting sun I advanced. I washed my weapons in the sea."³⁴

A few years later, in 854 B.C., Shalmaneser was met by a formidable Syrian coalition of twelve kings in the famous battle of Karkar. Among those who opposed him was Ahab, the king of Israel, who commanded two thousand chariots and ten thousand soldiers. In this encounter Shalmaneser claimed

³³Jack Finegan, Light From The Ancient Past (Fourth printing; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c. 1946), p. 170.

³⁴Ibid., p. 171.

that he won an overwhelming victory, yet the fact that he had to make repeated campaigns against Damascus in 850, 849 and 845 may indicate that the victory was not as decisive as he had boasted it was.

On one of his later campaigns, however, Shalmaneser compelled Jehu of Israel to pay him heavy tribute. The Black Obelisk, which records the military achievements of Shalmaneser III during the first thirty-one years of his reign, pictures Jehu kneeling in humility and defeat before the Assyrian monarch. The inscription reads: "Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden breaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins, I received from him."³⁵

Again in 839 B.C. he fought against Damascus, but because of revolts at home, little is heard of Assyria thereafter until 803. Meanwhile Israel was subjected to fierce treatment at the hand of Syria.³⁶ Hazael, taking advantage of Assyria's weakness, attacked the borders of Israel on the northeast, and seized most of Israel's territory across the Jordan. Under Jehoahaz, Jehu's son and successor, Israel suffered even greater reverses and indignities, which the Biblical historian summarizes by saying: "The king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by thresh-

³⁵Ibid., p. 173.

³⁶2 Kings 10:32 f.; 13:3.

ing,"³⁷ leaving them only fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand infantrymen.

But Israel's fortunes began to change about the turn of the century, when Adad-nirari (810-783) became king of Assyria. He returned to the attack, besieged and captured Damascus. In one vigorous campaign he broke the power of Syria. But his armies were unable to follow up their victories and sweep into Palestine; instead Assyria went into a long period of decline, during which time very little of Assyria's history is known, since ancient kings recorded only their victories. Unfortunately, neither the Bible nor Assyrian monuments give us any enlightenment on the subject in which we are most interested, namely, Jeroboam's relation to Assyria at this time. While it is no doubt true that Assyria was torn by revolt, she did muster enough power to overthrow the Arameans of Damascus in 773 and their neighbors of Hadrach in 772 and 765. Smith remarks: "It is hard to think that he (Jeroboam) paid no tribute to the 'king of kings.'"³⁸ But certainly there is nothing in history to indicate that he did. What then could have caused this remarkable "armistice" between Israel and Assyria in the very time that Jonah was prophesying? Neither the book of Kings nor the

³⁷2 Kings 13:7.

³⁸George A. Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (Revised edition; New York and London: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), I, 43.

annals of world history give us the answer.

But one thing is certain, Adad-nirari's defeat of Syria was Israel's opportunity. It set the stage for Israel to enter upon a half century of unparalleled prosperity, in which she as a nation reached new heights of prestige and power. King Joash, with the blessing of the aged prophet Elisha resting upon him, gained three decisive victories over the Syrians and recovered the cities which had been taken from his father.³⁹

Jeroboam II (782-753) came to the throne of Israel with a flowing tide. Encouraged by the prophet Jonah, he succeeded in enlarging the borders of his kingdom until they extended from the approach to Hamath in the extreme north to the Dead Sea in the south.⁴⁰ About the same time Uzziah, king of Judah, also undertook a military campaign in which he extended Judah's borders south to the Red Sea, crushing the Philistines. He had reorganized his army and had invented new machines of siege for casting stones. On his frontiers he built watch towers. All of this meant greater security for Judah and Israel. There was no longer any fear of invasion. The political future of Israel seemed assured. Samaria, the capital, was considered impregnable.⁴¹

³⁹2 Kings 13:23-25.

⁴⁰2 Kings 14:28.

⁴¹Amos 6:1.

Economically speaking, Israel was enjoying a period of prosperity. There were the spoils of victory, tribute from the vanquished, and an increase in trade and commerce. Smith notes that Israel had a port on the Red Sea, and was in command of the main caravan routes between Egypt and the North and between the desert and the Levant.⁴² This tended to increase the importance of towns and town-life. A vast building program followed.⁴³ The wealthy had summer homes as well as winter homes. They reveled in luxury, eating the choicest kinds of food.⁴⁴ "It was the Indian summer of Northern Israel's history."⁴⁵

But this tide of material prosperity brought with it also serious social evils and a sharp decline in moral and religious life. "It was an age of riches without religion and money without morals."⁴⁶ While the wealthy rapidly grew more prosperous, the poor were reduced to the position of slaves. A number of factors contributed to this unfortunate situation. Kent calls attention to the fact that in early

⁴²Smith, op. cit., p. 29.

⁴³Hosea 8:14; Isaiah 9:10.

⁴⁴Amos 6:4-6.

⁴⁵Charles F. Kent, The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1909), p. 51.

⁴⁶H. I. Hester, The Heart of the Hebrew History (Liberty, Missouri: The William Jewell Press, c.1949), p. 231.

days each Hebrew lived on his own hereditary estate. But the wars with the Arameans had caused many Israelite families to lose their property and even to be reduced to slaves because they were unable to pay their debts.⁴⁷ But two of the prime reasons for much of the poverty was greed on the part of the nobles and merchant class, coupled with the injustice of the courts.

We find in the book of Amos a vivid picture of the social evils which prevailed at that time. Courts were unbelievably corrupt; for even the smallest bribe they betrayed the cause of the poor.⁴⁸ In defiance of God and with daring contempt for his commandments the judges trampled righteousness under foot. They gave a poor man justice only when he could pay for it, and with their ill-gotten gain they built themselves palaces.⁴⁹ They accepted bribes paid by the rich offenders to escape the consequences of crimes.⁵⁰ Even the pleasure-seeking women of Samaria urged their husbands on to violence and fraud in order to obtain the means to satisfy their extravagance and finance their debauchery.⁵¹ Finally, Amos describes the rich of Samaria as an animal pant-

⁴⁷Kent, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁸Amos 2:6.

⁴⁹Amos 5:7, 11.

⁵⁰Amos 5:12.

⁵¹Amos 4:1.

ing greedily for the poor in order to swallow him by grasping his land for himself. They accomplished their ends by cheating the poor with small measures, increasing prices, false scales and inferior goods.⁵² Thus, in their mad zeal to build greater palaces and enjoy their luxuries, the rulers and judges of Israel neglected ordinary justice and mercy.

At the same time, they were outwardly religious. They observed festivals and days of worship with Pharisaic scrupulousness, for the letter, if not the spirit.⁵³ They made regular pilgrimages to the shrines at Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. They paid tithes to Jehovah oftener than He required.⁵⁴ But their religion was one of external devotion to their God; it was an outward, heartless, hypocritical, counterfeit worship which sprung from no true conception of God. Amos says that they sought His sanctuaries, but Him they did not seek. With daring contempt for His laws they profaned the name of God with shameless immorality, and desecrated the sanctuary with drinking carousals.⁵⁵

These sins of the times were sharply denounced by two of Israel's greatest prophets, Amos and Hosea, but seemingly to no avail. Amos reminded this complacent people of the past

⁵²Amos 8:4-6.

⁵³Amos 8:5.

⁵⁴Amos 4:4 f.

⁵⁵Amos 2:7-8; 6:4-6.

calamities and visitations which God had sent to bring them to repentance: famine, drought, plague, pestilence, defeat at the hand of their enemy, etc. Yet these divine visitations had not touched the proud, self-satisfied Israelites. The rulers of the nation were satisfied with things as they were. As long as Assyria was quiet and other neighboring nations let them alone, Israel feared no coming judgment. Some even looked forward to the day of the Lord when Jehovah would judge the heathen and redeem Israel, exalting her to might and dominion over all nations.⁵⁶ Finally, the prophet Amos threatened them with "captivity beyond Damascus," which undoubtedly they understood to be Assyria.⁵⁷

G. A. Smith describes the attitude of the people who lived under Jeroboam II in these pointed words: "It was a marvellous generation - so joyous, so energetic, so patriotic, so worshipful! But its strength was the strength of cruel wealth; its peace, the peace of an immoral religion."⁵⁸

But this period of prosperity in Israel came to an abrupt close with the death of Jeroboam II. The wickedness of the nation had finally caught up with it, and there followed a period of revolution and anarchy. Jeroboam's son Zechariah was on the throne only six months when he was slain by Shallum.

⁵⁶Amos 5:18.

⁵⁷Amos 5:27; 6:14.

⁵⁸Smith, op. cit., p. 38.

The assassin usurped the throne, but ruled only a month when he was slain by Menahem (752-742 B.C.).

In the east Assyria was once more stretching itself for a battle for supremacy. In 745 B.C. Assyria came to life in a vigorous way when a great warrior and statesman usurped the throne and took the famous name of Tiglath-Pileser III. His power was soon felt in Palestine. When he invaded the west, Menahem was compelled to pay the enormous tribute of one thousand talents of silver, the equivalent of about one and a half million dollars, to permit him to remain securely on his throne.⁵⁹ This was the beginning of the end which finally led to the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. before the armies of Sargon.

This, in brief, is the history of northern Israel and of Assyria in the century when, according to the Scripture,⁶⁰ Jonah lived and prophesied. What evidence can be drawn from the history of this period? It must be recognized that, aside from the book of Jonah itself, neither Old Testament history nor Assyrian inscriptions mention the visit to Nineveh and its general repentance. This omission, however, must not be taken as proof that there could have been no such journey. It is known that the books of Kings and Chronicles at times omit events which may be considered important by world his-

⁵⁹ 2 Kings 15:19.

⁶⁰ 2 Kings 14:25 ff.

torians,⁶¹ and Assyrian kings recorded only their successes in their inscriptions. In addition, it will be noted that, while the Old Testament is silent on Jonah's preaching in Nineveh and its subsequent repentance, in the New Testament Christ Himself makes mention of both events,⁶² as does also Jewish tradition.⁶³

It is to be noted, furthermore, that while the history of Assyria and of Israel offers no direct evidence to support the authorship of Jonah, it is possible to make a number of interesting observations.

1. For Jonah to have been the author, relating an eye-witness account of his historic journey to Assyria, certain historical conditions had to be met. Above all, the narrative had to have an eighth century background and should not conflict with the spirit of the times.

Now it is interesting to note that when we accept Jonah as the author, all of the necessary requirements of history are met. Jonah, the hero of the story, was an eighth century prophet; in the book he is portrayed as a true child of his times, possessing a strongly patriotic spirit; he is commanded to pronounce judgment against Assyria, Israel's eighth

⁶¹The battle of Karkar is not mentioned in Scripture. Jeroboam's reign of forty-one years is covered in four verses.

⁶²Matthew 12:40 f.; Luke 11:30-32.

⁶³Tobit 14:4-6:15.

century foe. Though reluctant at first, the prophet proclaims the destruction of Nineveh within forty days. Assyria, passing through a period of depression in the mid-eighth century and shaken by revolt, repents in sackcloth and ashes, whereupon God in His mercy and grace relents and spares the great but wicked city.

Thus there is nothing in history to indicate that Jonah could not have been the author; instead his experiences, as they are related in the prophecy, are in agreement with the spirit of the times.

2. More important still is the observation that this is a story which carries a message that was very applicable to eighth century Israel. Israel had become a highly nationalistic people in the time of her prosperity. She considered herself alone to be the object of God's care; she looked for a "day of the Lord" when Jehovah would judge the heathen and exalt Israel to a place of dominion over the gentiles.

Before she could fulfill her divine mission in the world as a blessing to the gentile nations, it would be necessary for her to learn that God's love and care extends also to the heathen. Since it is the purpose of the book of Jonah to teach that very lesson, it may well have been written for eighth century Israelites.

3. It is a story which carries a message that was being proclaimed also by other eighth century prophets. The doctrine of God's universal care and providence was a strong

feature in the preaching of such contemporaries of Jonah as Joel, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Amos portrayed God as one who is the Lord of all, who controls nature, whose power and control extends over the heathen nations as well as over Israel.⁶⁴ Joel, the prophet whom many conservative scholars believe was an early contemporary of Jonah, preached Jehovah as a God who controls the course of the nations, who spares those who repent of their sins.⁶⁵ Isaiah, a later contemporary of Jonah, includes among his prophecies a great variety of passages which speak of Jehovah as the God of all the nations, a God of grace and love.⁶⁶ Thus, the message of Jonah did not proclaim a new doctrine, as modern critics maintain, but it illustrated a teaching that was well known among the eighth century prophets.

Therefore, while it is conceded that contemporary history in the eighth century brings no direct evidence, either that Jonah was the author of the book which bears his name, or even that the writing is a product of the eighth century, still when these observations from history are considered in the light of the other arguments set forth by conservative scholars, they add support to the opinion that Jonah is the

⁶⁴Amos 1 and 2; 4:6-13.

⁶⁵Joel 2:11-14. There are numerous parallels between the book of Joel and that of Jonah.

⁶⁶Isaiah 2:2-5; 9:1-6; 11:1-5,9; 40:27 f.; 45:22; 54:2.

author.

There remains yet one question to be answered. When did Jonah write his prophecy? Conservative scholars are agreed that he must have composed it shortly after his return from Nineveh. And it is quite possible that the prophet's visit to the Assyrian capital occurred shortly before the reign of Tiglath-Pileser. Some have thought that the mission to Nineveh might have taken place at the time of Menahem, during the period of the first invasion of Israel by the Assyrians. But if this were the case, Jonah would have had to be a very old man when he was entrusted with the mission to Nineveh.⁶⁷

Thus, when the evidence is in and has been considered objectively, one reaches the inevitable conclusion that, while the arguments set forth by liberal scholarship are ingenious and cleverly devised, and, at first glance may seem very plausible, they are based upon few proven facts. Their conclusions are supported by neither sound Biblical exegesis, nor by history. Their arguments are often based on the unscriptural premise that miracles cannot happen in our physical world, and that the Bible is a human product containing numerous errors and later additions.

On the other hand, the opinion held by conservative scholars is based upon such concrete evidence as the follow-

⁶⁷Keil, op. cit., p. 379.

ing.

1. The title of the book, contained in 1:1, which was regarded by the Jewish church to indicate authorship.

2. It is the tradition of the Jewish and Christian churches that Jonah was the author.

3. Christ's acceptance of the Hebrew canon which included the book of Jonah.

4. The place which the book occupies in the canon points to a pre-exilic date of composition.

5. The nature of the prophecy indicates that the author is making a confession of his own failings.

6. The vivid and graphic style suggests that it is an eyewitness story.

7. The lack of evidence which would prove that the historic position of the Christian church is in error.

In view of these facts, the weight of evidence favors the opinion held by the scholars of the conservative school of thought, namely, that the eighth century prophet Jonah is not only the hero, but also the author of the book which appears in Scripture under his name.

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